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Cameroon Rafting Expedition 2025

by Dave Woetzel

Background

Reports of a living sauropod dinosaur have been coming from explorers in western equatorial Africa since the late 18th century, especially from the countries of Gabon, Cameroon and the Republic of the Congo.[1] Numerous expeditions have gone in search of this elephant-sized animal with a long neck, long tail, and a violent disposition. In Congo, the pygmies call it Mokele-mbembe, which means "one who stops the flow of rivers" in the Lingala language. This Congolese name for the animal, more than any of the other indigenous names, has stuck because of highly publicized research trips to the rivers and swamps of Congo in the late 20th century.[2]

By the 1990s, expeditions into the Congo basin largely ended because civil unrest made travel dangerous. But in 2000 Bill Gibbons and I learned from pioneer missionaries that the Baka pygmy peoples in southeast Cameroon also knew of this dinosaurian animal. The creature was said to inhabit the remote rivers and larger jungle pools. It makes sense that a population of river-dwelling animals would be dispersed throughout this multi-national region since the rivers are all connected, forming a single drainage basin. The key rivers in southeastern Cameroon are the Dja and the Boumba. These merge and become the Ngoko River, which then flows into the Sangha. The Sangha River forms the eastern border of Cameroon, separating it from Central African Republic. Eventually, the Sangha River flows south into The Republic of the Congo.

The southern plateau region of Cameroon experiences two short rainy seasons, typically occurring from May to June and again (even heavier) from October to early November. Other parts of Cameroon typically experience just one main rainy season from May to November. The heavy rainfall in the south feeds the tributaries of the Dja and Boumba. Thus, water levels will rise and fall rather significantly. Cameroon's dry season lasts from late November through April and corresponds with the highest average temperatures of the year.

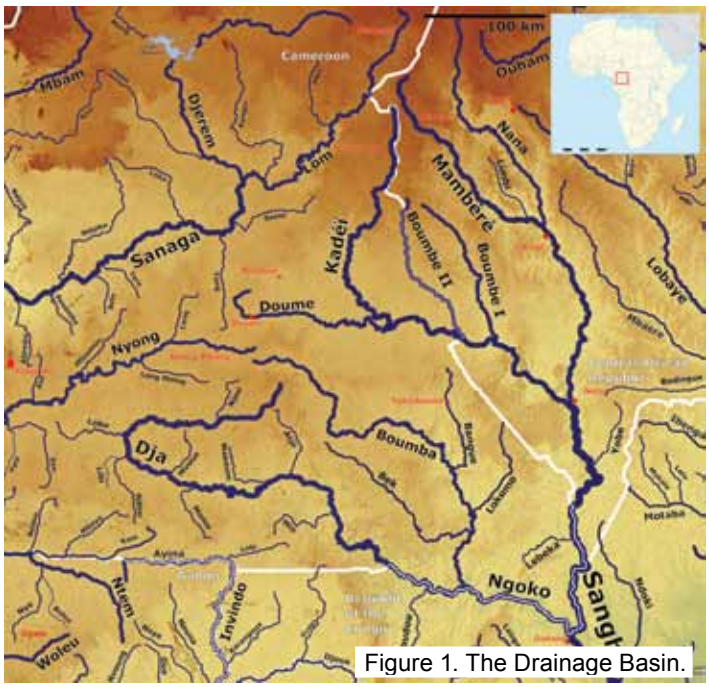

Figure 1. The Drainage Basin.

2000 Expedition and Follow-up

In late November of 2000, Bill Gibbons and I pioneered research in southeastern Cameroon by slogging through seasonal swamps, cutting a path through virgin rain forests, and interviewing pygmy forest peoples who had never spoken with an outside explorer. From village to village, informants knew of the creature and could pick it out of a lineup of animals. Most had never seen it, though they knew about it and could readily draw a credible picture of it. Some of the fisherman who spent most of their life on the river had seen it. The Baka pygmies in Cameroon call the creature Li-ke'la-bembe, which

Figure 2. Mokele-mbembe (after Mackal, 1987).

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Math Matters

Mount Everest Math

by Don DeYoung, PhD

This Himalayan peak lies on the border of Nepal and China, reaching 29,032 ft (8,849 m) above sea level. If measured from ocean floor base to peak, Hawaii's twin peaks Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa stand even higher with Mauna Kea at 33,500 ft (10,210 m).

The Everest surface rock layers are largely sedimentary limestone embedded with marine fossils, including trilobites, brachiopods and crinoids. The entire Himalayan mountain range was uplifted during and following the Genesis Flood event. Just as standard geology describes, Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates collided, although the Biblical creation timescale greatly shortens the process. Everest height is currently increasing by millimeters each year due to crustal rebound.

The energy required to uplift an entire mountain mass from sea level to Everest height is on the order of 10^{20} joules. This is roughly equal to the annual electrical energy consumption of the entire world. Clearly, the tectonics of mountain formation is massively energetic.

Temperatures at the Everest summit typically range from -2F° (-19°C) to -33°F (-36°C), dropping as low as -76°F (-60°C) during December-January. At the peak, air holds 33% as much oxygen as at sea level. The 8,000 meter (26,247 ft) elevation is called the 'death zone'. Here, oxygen starvation may lead to lethal medical issues without supplemental oxygen. On the less-serious side, the low air pressure on Everest reduces water's boiling point to 154°F (68°C) so there is no hard boiling of eggs!

Bar-headed geese migrate over the Himalayas, including Mt. Everest. Above 20,000 feet, permanent snow cover precludes resident animal and plant life. At lower elevations, however, the

Aerial view of Mount Everest from the South. Wikimedia Commons CC BY-SA 2.0.

Himalayas are biologically rich. This includes butterflies, lichens, grasses, and the Himalayan brown bear, sometimes confused with Yeti! An excursion to the summit of Mount Everest is a lengthy and dangerous process. The expense of gear, insurance, training, travel, permits, and guides may reach $100,000+. The time commitment averages 6-9 weeks, including altitude acclimatization.

Mount Everest provides two creation lessons. First, this world is blessed with abundant life. Even extreme locations, whether mountain heights or ocean depths, exhibit thriving plant, animal, and microscopic ecosystems. Second, the earth's entire surface shows dramatic reworking during the Genesis Flood. 2 Peter 3:6 explains that the preflood world perished, resulting in our current world, including the formation of Mount Everest.

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means "lizard foot with slippery skin," rather than Mokele-mbembe.

Eyewitnesses along the Boumba River led us to where a Li-ke'la-bembe had been seen, in some cases quite recently. Its actions were described in fascinating detail, including the fact that it utilizes its tail as its primary weapon against crocodiles, hippos, and even fisherman in dugout canoes. This harmonizes with paleontologist's findings that certain sauropods had weaponized their tail.[3] The Baka also describe the Li-ke'la-bembe's proximal toe as larger than the others, with a sizeable claw that it uses for digging into the riverbanks.

The water level on the Boumba Rivers was very high in late November, slowing our progress as we painstakingly hiked downstream. Visibility was limited because of difficulty in approaching the overflowing riverbanks. The jungle canopy on either side of the river forms a curtain of green. Our whole approach to the target area on foot seemed problematic to me. We were only able to research a small stretch of the river. Moreover, our movement through the dense jungle on foot with machetes was so noisy that it scared the animals away. We came upon gorilla beds that were still warm, but we never saw a gorilla. I determined that if I ever returned, I would find a quieter way to work along the river.

A follow-up trip was initiated by the BBC in 2001. Their TV documentary[4] popularized southern Cameroon as a promising dinosaurian cryptid location. A later trip, led by Canadians Brian Sass and Peter Beach, discovered an island in the lower Dja River with an apparent abandoned nesting cave dug out of the riverbank. Such "burrow digging" activity on the part of dinosaurs was confirmed by a fossil discovered in 2008. A paleontologist from Montana State University stumbled upon a sandstone "S-shaped" mass that was about 7 feet long.[5] At the end of this feature were the bones of an adult dinosaur and two juveniles. Apparently, they had nested in the burrow which had filled with an influx of sand, trapping them inside. This fossil burrow, which is surrounded by rock derived from mud and clay, is strong evidence that digging and denning dinosaurs cared for their young. The scenario exactly matches the reports from Cameroon. The Li-ke'la-bembe is said to dig out a cave and retreat into it for the hottest portion of the dry season. This hot season torpor, called aestivation, is known amongst extant turtles and some crocodilians.

Figure 3. An abandoned nest.

Further expeditions, have scoured the lower Dja region. One French researcher, named Michel Ballot, has made several trips into this region. He found and photographed some footprints on a sandy island in the Dja River[6]. The numerous researchers who followed up on our initial trip in 2000 typically traversed the rivers of Cameroon using a gas-powered boat. Moloundou, on Cameroon's southern border, became a bit of a hub for this research. But the downside to that boat approach was even more noise than our expedition in 2000. Gasoline outboard engines frighten off most wildlife for a long distance, well before a researcher can get close enough for a photograph.

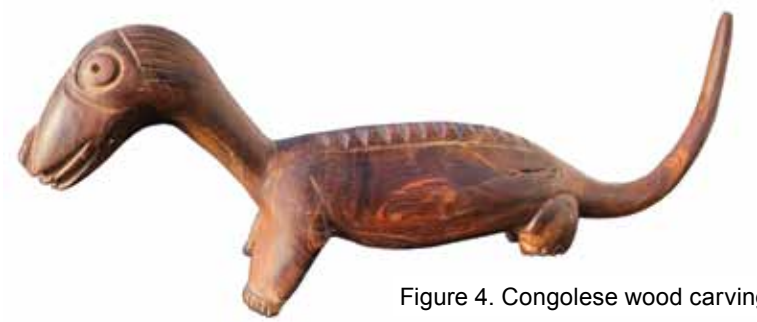

Figure 4. Congolese wood carving.

African Carvings

After returning from Cameroon in 2000, I continued to research evidence for a sauropod in equatorial Africa. I came upon a couple of intriguing wood carvings made by African craftsmen well before the publication of Mokele-mbembe research by recent explorers. The first is an indigenous carving that showed up in a souvenir shop in the Congo in the early 1980s. The tribal artist was clearly trying to depict a long-necked, long-tailed animal. Notice that it seems to be herbivorous (no sharp teeth depicted). The sturdy legs and upright posture match up well with the general morphology of a sauropod, though the appendages are unrealistically short. Perhaps the artist had only seen the animal in the water. Curious markings are seen going down the back. Are these an attempt to depict a dermal frill—something like the spikes that modern paleoartists draw on sauropods? The reptile is accurately shown without an outer ear. The whole piece is 15 inches long and 6 inches tall.

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The second wood carving is modern in design. It is identified as a west African artifact and is housed at Glencomeragh House in Ireland. This was once the home of the Rosminian Fathers, a missionary order that worked for many years in Africa. Some of the Irish fathers brought back souvenirs of their time serving there. It is estimated that this piece was acquired in the 1950s (again placing it before the modern Mokele-mbembe research was popularized). The carving clearly shows a sauropod dinosaur with very large scales. The fan-like flap of skin depicted under the tail is a feature that has not been reported by eyewitnesses from Africa, nor is it known in paleontology. Is it an attempt to portray a cloaca? Another oddity with the carving is the small neck of the apparent juvenile. The piece is about six inches tall but is quite heavy. It seems to have been carved from a single piece of dense wood. Perhaps the original wooden block was too small for the artist to add a long neck on the baby sauropod.

2025 Expedition Challenges

I determined to lead another expedition to Cameroon in 2025. After the struggles with high water levels on my previous trip, I decided we should leave at the end of December and arrive in the target area in early January. In addition to having the riverbanks visible, lower water levels would constrain large river dwellers (that had perhaps gone up tributaries and into jungle pools) down into the deeper rivers. My partner for this trip was Josiah Moore of Saint Joseph, Missouri. Our plan was to float quietly down the Boumba River on an inflatable raft. We decided to take an electric outboard motor as a precaution, in case we needed to get back upstream or were being threatened by a large animal. This new strategy allowed us to navigate the rivers stealthily, approaching wildlife without frightening them off. In retrospect, the idea was great, but perhaps overly ambitious for a trip to remote parts of Africa. We ran into numerous problems along the way, and it was only by God's good providence that we were able to complete any of our objectives.

Figure 5. West African wood carving.

The first problem we encountered was shipping the large lithium-ion battery needed for the electric motor. No commercial jets would take it. So, it had to be specially packaged and sent on a cargo plane. DHL assured us it would be there on time, so we sent the box off towards the capital city of Yaounde, where we were scheduled to arrive on December 27. But then the shipment got stuck in Nigeria. It wasn't due to arrive in Douala, Cameroon on the seacoast until mid-January. After much prayer and phone calls to shipping agents, DHL suddenly informed us that it had arrived in Douala on Christmas Day!

The next major problem we ran into was transporting the rubber raft. I had checked with the airline and had been assured that the 80lb rubber raft box would be allowed onboard, subject to an overweight luggage fee. I even had the representative make a note of this on my reservation. But when I arrived at Boston's Logan Airport for the flight, the airline staff refused to take the raft box. They said the earlier representative had made an error and it was just too heavy to take. So, I had to head off towards Paris with just my backpack and electric motor box.

Our flight from Paris to Cameroon stopped at Central African Republic along the way. This was only supposed to be a brief stop. But then the pilot announced that we had paperwork issues. Then the plane had some mechanical problems. Finally, they asked us all to disembark and crowded us into a little lobby for the entire night. We slept as best we could on the floor and on metal benches. 14 hours later we were again on our way to Yaounde! I had built a couple of extra days into our itinerary, knowing from my prior expeditions how things can get bogged down in a third world country. But even that wasn't enough. Our planned 13 days on the river soon had to be abbreviated by a few days.

We arrived in Yaounde, Cameroon on December 28th, a day late, and connected with our guide Pierre. But the tale of woe continued. Our luggage missed our flight in Paris and was sent to Senegal. It would not be in Cameroon for a few days. We took the time to scour the capital region, looking for a large rubber raft. But no rafts with a transom (the stiff flat back where a motor can be attached) could be found. Our guide recommended we go to the port city of Douala and search there. Also, my battery was still stuck in customs in Douala. So, off we went in a taxi, driving 7 hours to the west (the opposite direction of our target area). Tom Needham, a Cameroonian missionary friend, gave us

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a contact in Douala named Ciprian. He was a Godsend, devoting a lot of time to searching the city for a rubber raft.

Late that night we arrived in Douala and met with Ciprian. He reported that he'd looked all over the city. One store had a couple of "new" rafts for sale at an exorbitant price. We investigated and found that these were falling apart at the seams. Ciprian knew of an old used raft down by the marina. But it was said to be in dilapidated condition, stored outside with large motor parts piled upon it. In complete despair, we just stopped to pray. Then we went down to examine the used raft. It turned out that the owner was a boat smith who had been trained in Germany. He assured us he could clean the old raft, patch it up, and have it ready for us the next day. After some negotiating, we agreed to rent it from him. Then we hurried over to the DHL office to work on getting our battery through customs.

All in all, we lost an additional three days in Douala. On the morning of December 31, we loaded the battery and the raft into our taxi and drove several hours back to Yaounde. At the airport we found that our luggage had arrived from Senegal. Next, we rented a large van that could carry all our gear and traveled several hours east to the small city of Bertoua. Early the next morning we got up to do a fly over of our target area with missionary pilot Tom Needham.

A reconnaissance flight was important because it allowed us to observe any dangerous waterfalls on the Boumba River and mark them on our satellite-enabled Garmin device. We noted one especially treacherous stretch of river near the town of Ngola. Tom landed the plane on a small dirt airstrip in Lokomo where we refueled. We handed out tracts and made some important contacts for a future church plant. While we were flying over the river, our guide Pierre worked to obtain a letter from the regional governor, giving us permission to enter the national park and do research on the river.

Pierre had rented a 4X4 pickup to take us and all our gear south to the Boumba River. It was a 10-hour trip. Since time was now of the essence, we obtained an assurance that the driver would be there at 8:00am sharp. But the pickup and driver didn't show up till 3:00pm. It seems that the vehicle had some mechanical issues and was being serviced. I'm not sure how much good the mechanic did because the alternator gave out and the battery died shortly after we left Bertoua. We had to jump start the pickup multiple times. Then the car's back bumper fell off. Nonetheless, we made it to the frontier town of Yakadouma just as night was falling. The next morning, we started out early for the Boumba River. I knew from our maps that there was a ferry crossing where we could easily put in, just below the town of Kongo. We arrived at the river's edge, inflated our raft, attached the electric motor, mounted our GoPro on the front, loaded our gear, and started downstream.

Figure 6. Rafting down the Boumba.

Research on the River

The raft immediately began to both leak and deflate. We had to bail almost constantly and re-inflate every couple of hours. We stopped at an island, and I worked to patch the raft with a kit I'd brought for emergency purposes. After a few days of patching, the raft improved so that we only needed to inflate the air chambers once in the morning and we were only required to bail every 30 minutes or so. The water level in the Boumba River was much lower than on my November trip years ago. It was so low that we were required to jump out and push the raft downstream over the rocks on Day 1. We were informed by pygmies along the river that it had been an unusually short rainy season. For our purposes, it might have been better to have gone in early December when the water was a bit higher. As we progressed downstream, the water levels did increase, making it easier to navigate.

On Day 2 we ran into some rapids and small waterfalls. Twice the raft filled with water, and we were in danger of capsizing. Everything we carried onboard became waterlogged, and the only working camera was the GoPro up front. Our large bag of rice went rancid in a couple of days, and we all struggled with stomach infection issues. Along our way downstream, we explored some tributaries, especially the Lokomo and the Bek Rivers. From mid-morning to mid-afternoon, we would

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unfold our portable solar panel and plug it into the battery. This helped to keep the battery charged up for use on slow-moving parts of the river. The electric motor with a propeller guard was an amazing combination, very quiet and reliable. Josiah was positioned at the front of the raft with his camera equipment, and our guide was seated in the middle. I sat in the back, working the electric outboard. Our stealthy approach worked, allowing us to see monkeys, a river otter, exotic birds, snakes, a gorilla, and other wildlife up close. We never saw the big (and potentially dangerous) river animals: hippos, elephants, and crocodiles.

After a week, we arrived at the Ngola Waterfall. This 12 ft drop proved impassable. With difficulty I hiked to the bottom, trying to find a way to haul our gear around. The remains of broken pygmy pirogs (dugout canoes) gave testimony to the power of this waterfall. I could also see rapids and another 8 ft drop further downstream! When we prayed for wisdom, a group of pygmies showed up. They informed us that there was a 1 km trail around the waterfall and agreed to help us portage around. We carried our backpacks, and they took the raft, motor, battery, etc. Within 2 hours we were reinflated and back on the river. So, God continued to watch over us.

At the end of a long day on the river, we always looked forward to making camp. We scouted out a fairly level, dry stretch of riverbank where we could prepare our campsite, a location that had some trees for hanging hammocks. Jungle hammocks are much better than tents on expeditions where the terrain is uneven, or the ground is muddy. The hammocks are lightweight, go up quickly, and are very flexible (even for attaching to large roots). After getting our hammocks hung, we made a fire for cooking and drying out our wet clothes & sleeping bags. We boiled river water, added some dried foodstuffs, and made up a stew dinner. Often pygmy fisherman would come to watch us make camp. The

Figure 7. The campsite.

hammocks fascinated them to no end, as did our pumping river water through a filter into our canteens.

Our guide spoke Baka and he asked them about animals they'd been seeing on the river. Over the 9 days on the river, we interviewed dozens of these forest people. It seems that the dinosaur trail in that area has gone a bit cold since my last expedition. All the Baka along the Boumba River knew about the Li-ke'la-bembe. But they reported that it was now very unusual to see one. Most of the young fishermen only knew about it from their parent's stories. "Back in the day," they would tell us, "It was very dangerous to do what you are doing. If a pirog entered the pool where the Li-ke'la-bembe lived, the monster would immediately attack it and flip it over!"

Several times we paused our journey downstream to investigate sandbars and muddy islands where we hoped to observe animal tracks. On the seventh day, we stopped at a particularly large sandbar. I saw a large footprint of an animal that had apparently walked upstream, stepping just one time onto the sandbar. Our guide,

Figure 8. Baka pygmies.

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who was trained in tracking, said it was not an elephant footprint. But the track was too obscure to say for certain what it was. We placed multiple motion-activated trail cameras along the river at strategic locations. We particularly chose places where the rivers merged. The French researcher Michel Ballot plans to make an expedition to Cameroon later this year and hopes to retrieve these cameras.

After nine days on the river, we were running low on time, food, and antibiotics for our stomach disorders. We arrived at a ferry crossing near the confluence of the Boumba and Bek Rivers and decided to pull out there. Our starting location on the Boumba River was by the Kongo Ferry Crossing (Google Maps: 3.118431, 15.050564) and our ending location was at the Bek River Ferry Crossing (Google Maps: 2.482264, 15.250270). As a final insult from our rental pickup, the transmission died on the way back out of the bush. Again, God provided for us wondrously after we prayed. Within an hour, a bigger pickup truck "happened" to come by. There was plenty of room in the bed, and the driver was headed in our direction. We abandoned our rental, loaded our gear into the big pickup, and made it back to town.

Figure 9. Map of the Boumba River area.

Conclusion & Follow-up Research

At the end of the day, we came up a bit short of our objective on this expedition. We didn't get as far down the river as we hoped because of time lost early in the trip. Also, the low water made for slower progress downstream than we'd planned. But we did investigate a large stretch of the upper Boumba River and its tributaries, obtaining intelligence that could help future expeditions. Moreover, we broke new ground with the novel inflatable raft and electric motor strategy, proving it was an effective way to approach and photograph the local wildlife.

Based on Google Maps distance calculator, my partner Josiah determined that we traveled just over 97 miles of river. Our original plan was to traverse about 140 miles along the Boumba River (along with some side trips up the prominent tributaries). He estimated that we made about 15 miles of progress per day, floating and slowly motoring downstream. This means we might have reached our original ending goal, the city of Moloundou, if we had 3-4 more days on the river.

In conclusion, I want to offer a few suggestions for future expeditions. One should look into shipping gear much earlier than we did. It is imperative to plan for multiple extra days of delays all along the way. Having several waterproof dry bags would have been helpful for us. Batteries, lighters, and camera equipment all suffered from water exposure. Space is an issue on a raft. Having big containers of food (oatmeal bags, a rice bag, large cans of meat, etc.) proved very convenient for us and took up less space than single-portion meal packs. But we might have done well to take less and then resupply at some midway point along the way. The handheld Garmin with its satellite subscription proved to be very useful. It allowed us to know where we were on the river and intelligently modify our plans as we went. It also gave us the ability to send brief text messages to the outside world.

I do not think the upper Boumba River that we explored is worthy of further research at this time. However, I'm very dubious that the cryptids that had lived there all died off. I think the Li-ke'la-bembe migrated out of the Boumba River area because of the encroachment of timbering and mining activities. There are two logical places where they may have gone. The first is far up the Dja River, deeper into the national park. If I were planning an expedition to follow up, I would go to the village of Lomie (an 8-hour trip south from Yaounde) to investigate the headwaters of the Dja. A second possibility is that the animals went downstream to the bigger Ngoko River and some of its tributaries (southeast of Moloundou). Neither of these regions have really been explored. It is our hope that someone will make a reconnaissance trip to these target areas. Such a trip might obtain reports of more recent sightings or even a photo of the elusive dinosaurian cryptid.

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Prayer Matters

Praise: Thank you for all your prayers and financial support!

Prayer: Please pray for this year's CRS conference. We want this conference to glorify God, to inform attendees of new advances in creation research, and to be a beneficial time of Christian fellowship.

Please pray for the CRS board meeting on June 5-7.

Please pray that CRS will be able to find local undergraduate students to work in the lab

Thanks Again!

CRS News

Abstracts for the 2025 CRS Conference are being accepted through April 15th. To submit an abstract, visit creationresearch.org/conferences/conference-abstracts.

The 2025 CRS Conference will be held July 24-26 at Missouri Baptist University in St. Louis, Missouri. There is no other conference like this one. Don't miss it! For no additional charge, each attendee can also choose a workshop in astronomy, geology, or biology/genetics. There is also a free picnic for attendees after the conference on the 26th. Special pricing is available at several nearby hotels. For more information or to register, visit creationresearch.org/conferences/2025.

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